Chapter 6

The Principles of City Building

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The Development Framework is intended to provide a level of confidence that will foster and guide reinvestment. The next significant challenge is to achieve consensus on the means of implementing the vision. Four key principles are outlined below that should underpin this effort.

Foster an integrated approach.

Implicit in the Framework is a cultural shift in the methodology of city building. Just as land uses have become increasingly separated in the postwar period, so too have the tasks of city building. Tasks related to economic development, planning, parks, land use and transportation have increasingly been conducted in isolation. It is essential to remove the organizational and psychological barriers that isolate the various kinds of expertise and initiatives so essential to successful city making. The habits of mind that have grown up around the one-project or one-issue-at-a-time approach must be overcome. To ensure the highest quality projects and development, all relevant fields of expertise should have input. Each discipline can bring to the project a particular perspective that will ultimately enhance it.

To ensure the highest quality development, all fields of expertise must work cooperatively in the tasks of city building.



Partnerships between the public and private sectors and with surrounding communities create powerful alliances for realizing the vision.



Ensure stewardship.

There must be individuals or committees responsible for governing the Development Framework and ensuring its implementation at two levels. At the oversight level, there should be a structure to oversee and have ultimate responsibility for the Development Framework. Over the last two years, the City of Saint Paul, the Saint Paul Riverfront Corporation, the Capital City Partnership, and the Saint Paul Port Authority have worked together to oversee the creation of the Development Framework. This has been a successful and highly productive partnership between the public and private sectors. Consideration should be given to formalizing this relationship through the creation of a broadly representative Board or Oversight Committee that would be responsible for providing leadership and guiding implementation of the Framework.

There must also be clearly defined responsibility for the day-to-day management of the Development Framework. The staff team, made up of representatives from Planning and Economic Development, Parks and Recreation, Public Works, the Saint Paul Riverfront Corporation, the Capital City Partnership and West Side Citizens Organization, has played an integral role in the Framework's creation and should constitute the core of such a group. This team needs a leader and a clearly-defined leadership role in the City's departmental structure.

Additional urban design capacity and, in particular, urban design leadership must be provided within the City government. While the presence of the consultant team offered invaluable support during the development phase of the Framework, this responsibility must rest squarely within the City government in the years ahead. This is an urgent priority.

Finally, the citizens of Saint Paul have participated generously in the creation of the Development Framework through extensive public meetings, discussions and participation in the Design Charrettes. The continuing value of broad-based involvement needs to be emphasized during the implementation phase. On-going effort should be devoted to expanding this involvement and encouraging broad community outreach.

Provide clear policy direction while maintaining flexibility.

Because the city's evolution is dynamic and not entirely predictable, especially in its details, the Framework concentrates on broad relationships, maintaining an open stance and a margin of flexibility in its particulars. It is therefore important that the implementation process remain supple. As initiatives arise in a given area, a detailed response and direction should be provided to project proponents, giving consideration to need, opportunity and market conditions. Guidance from the City should focus primarily on the issues of fit and context as well as on the creation and maintenance of an attractive, safe and well-used public realm, a basic factor in urban vitality.

For the Framework to be fully effective, a number of public policy changes must be addressed. These should be reflected in the upcoming review of the Comprehensive Plan and Zoning Ordinance regarding, land use, transportation, open space, etc. In particular, the Framework proposes a design-based methodology that emphasizes compatible built form while encouraging mixed use. The City should establish design guidelines and a means of design review to ensure that maximum benefit is achieved from every project and development. The primary urban design issues to be addressed concern compatibility with context and existing local building typologies, appropriate scale of development, and defining and supporting the public realm.

Implementation of the Development Framework should strengthen the neighborhoods surrounding downtown.



The broad urban design directions established in the Framework itself are more general than the detailed design work needed to move ahead on specific proposals or urban design initiatives. As these move forward into implementation, a shift is required from the broad conceptual design guidelines spelled out in the Framework to a level of more detailed schematics in priority areas. High-quality urban design is not an "extra" that detracts from the financial viability of a project. By creating a better product and contributing to the quality of the total urban environment, it ultimately adds to the value of the project, as well as its long-term viability.

Invest strategically.

A vibrant, thriving and connected downtown core is a common goal that benefits all stakeholders. Greater vibrancy increases the value of private investments, attracts more investment and adds to the city's tax base, building upon itself in a snowball-like effect. There should be a more detailed periodic examination of the various market sectors and an on-going inventory of the lands and buildings available to accommodate foreseeable needs. The mixed-use vision proposed by the Framework should also be monitored in terms of projected tax revenues and its ability to move the city toward a sustainable economic base.

Good plans are manifested in successfully completed projects. The identification of strategic projects that set the standard and lead the way in the urban core's revitalization is vitally important. Relevant current examples are the start of construction of the new Science Museum relinking the core of the downtown to the waterfront, the replacement of the Wabasha Street bridge, and the Greening the Great River Park project. These initiatives represent pivotal developments that will provide considerable value well above their individual worth as free-standing projects. In the early stage, public funds will be required and should be used strategically to leverage private investment. The impact of each new project can be multiplied when it is linked to or expands an existing zone of success.

A number of other near-term objectives – in particular, within the Capitol-Mississippi Crescent – have been identified as the next generation of high priorities, including the reclamation of Harriet Island Park, the development of waterfront downtown housing (in the Upper Landing Precinct or on the West Side), and the refurbishing of Wabasha and St. Peter Streets as the downtown's principal pedestrian-oriented main streets. Other high priority projects include the further revitalization of Lowertown and the potential for an urban village in the Northeast Quadrant.

The Framework will be realized through a combination of projects at various scales. Although large-scale projects are important for the funds they bring, the energy directed toward attracting them should not be to the exclusion of smaller scale, fine-grained development. There is seldom a single "magic bullet." It is important to seek out more modest, incremental change to the built environment that builds on what already exists and initiatives already under way. Small scale opportunities – re-use of vacant lands, underutilized and "soft" sites, public, private and community initiatives – should be harnessed and capitalized upon. While these types of initiatives may not have immediate impacts individually, they should not be underestimated. Cumulatively and over time they effect profound change.

A more vibrant public realm can be achieved incrementally with a multi-disciplinary approach that seizes every opportunity to effect change and advance the larger vision. Capital projects can be augmented in a number of ways. For example, the cyclical reconstruction of streets, sidewalks, services and utilities is an opportune time to make design changes for a relatively small incremental cost by integrating urban design considerations into the normal capital budget preparation. In like fashion, each redevelopment project creates an opportunity to reshape a portion of the public realm.

The stage is set to implement *Saint Paul on the Mississippi*. Over the past decade, hundreds of millions of dollars have been invested in the Mississippi River. Hundreds, perhaps thousands, of citizens have become involved in redevelopment activities, from CEO's making downtown redevelopment a priority, to volunteers reforesting the river valley, to West Side citizens carving out a local economic development strategy. The Development Framework can direct and increase the impact of these diverse initiatives and create a level of confidence that will attract an even greater amount of resources. Working in partnership and building on the current momentum, with consensus and long-term commitment, the vision is within reach.

A thriving downtown core connected to the river is a common goal that benefits all stakeholders.

